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MARÍA ZAMBRANO

The Metaphor of the Heart¹

To Rafael Tomero Alarcón²

Translation by John Kraniauskas

I

In its carnal being the heart has holes/hollows, open chambers, it is divided so as to allow for something that does not appear proper to human consciousness's (own) centredness/being centre/seat. A seat/centre, at least according to the idea as transmitted/as set out by/in the philosophy of Aristotle: immobile/motionless motor, ultimate, supreme centre, impresses movement on the whole universe and/as well as on each of its creatures and beings, without exception. But (although/however) it does not open (up) a hole/hollow so that they may enter (that) its (very) turning/revolving/spinning (gírar), (that is,) in(side) its very being. The motionless/immobile motor has no holes, spaces within, it has no inside, that which now in times of Christian philosophy is called interiority. It/He? "attracts, like the object of the will or of desire attracts and moves without being moved by them". It/He? is impassive/immovable, pure act, "thought whose act is life/living"; life/living. But the life attracted and moved by this centre/seat that does not move, does not circulate through it, within it. It moves without moving whilst the helpless heart that one day, in an instant will (come to a) stop/halt, moves within our vulnerable and dejected life.

In this way, the circulation established by our heart passes through it/the heart, and without it would stagnate. It moves in movement, has an inside, (is) a modest home/abode/dwelling, in whose image and likeness have emerged the houses/homes/dwellings that man (has) happily inhabited/s. Happily because it is already a home, not a simple store/shop, the image of course of the firmament and of the hollow/hole that separates it from the earth/land. In it, in the shop/store or hut, the first dwelling/abode made/fabricated by man, the horizon is a boundary, a circle that limits and enwraps/harbors, is like the horizon proper (own) of its inhabitant/dweller. And it teaches/shows that everything that man considers his own/as proper is both dwelling and prison, his domain and at the same time his enclosure/seclusion. The home/house, the modest house in the image of the heart that allows circulation, the demands to be travelled/visited, is thus (ya por ello) the place of freedom, of seclusion (recogimiento – gathering) rather than of enclosure. The embodied/carnal heart's interior is the channel/course/bed of the river of blood, in which the blood divides and reunites with itself. And in doing so finds its reason/truth (razón). The first/primary reason for live of those organisms that

¹ This text must not be mistaken for another with the same title published in the journal *Orígenes* (Havanna), 1, 3, 1944, pp. 3-10, and later included in *Hacia un saber sobre el alma*, Losada, Buenos Aires, 1950, pp. 41-49. The author herself warns of a possible confusion in a letter to Agustín Andreu: 'It seemed to me that you thought that "the metaphor of the heart" of "Clearings..." was the same as "Hacia un saber..."'. But no, it is completely new. I was writing it when Ara left; and some of the pages when I was in the clinic. I finished it on returning here. And even after you left I added another short last paragraph which I have sent together with a Note for another section: "The Sun that Follows" that came to me at the time of Ara's death and what I felt that afternoon in Rafael's house'. (*Cartas de La Pièce*, op.cit., p. 150).

² Rafael Tomero Alarcón is María Zambrano's cousin; the brother of Mariano Tomero, María Zambrano's faithful servant and helper in her retirement in La Pièce until her death.

have/with blood, no doubt prophesized, as all life, from its originary poverty. Because life appears almost incognito, without a trace of splendor; poor life. And thus all living organisms look to possess a vacuum/emptiness, a hollow within itself, a true vital/living space, the trophy/reward of its settlement in the space it appears to want to conquer only by extending itself, colonizing it, and which is only the attempt of each living being later having a space of their own/proper, pure quality: that hollow/hole that stamps the supreme conquest of life, the appearance of a living being, right there where it appears.

A living being that appears the more 'being' the broader/greater and better/more qualified the voids/vacuum it contains. The voids of the embodied (carnal - flesh) human organism make up a (son todo un) continent or, rather, islands sustained by the heart, the centre that houses/accommodates/the seat of the flow of life, not so as to retain it, but rather so that it can pass in the form of dance/dancing, keeping step, approaching through dance the reason that is life. A living being that directs his own life from within in the image of the life of a certain universe in which conflagration would not be possible without the extinction of a n indelible reason, of a passing and repassing/to-ing and fro-ing that extinguishes itself, without reason. And being as such, therefore, originally vital reason remains in suspense, suspended in (la ilimitación) infinity (?).

II

The heart is also a centre/seat because of our being it alone gives off/has sounds out. Other centres there might be but one that sounds. And only because of it do those privileged to have it hear each other, that we imagine that, in some measure (grado) or other, all living beings must have it, as a privilege or affliction which reveals/shows the/that bipolarity that opens and grips (?) the living being.

Although man may pay little attention to the incessant sound of his heart, he is sustained/held up (on high) by it, at a certain level (?). It would be enough to be left without this loud/sonorous (sonoro?) beating to fall into darkness, to feel stranger/more alien, more without refuge/homeless, as deprived of a certain dimension, or of a call which itself creates the possibility of his existence.

And thus, the steps of man on earth seem to be the/appear to trace (huella) of the sound of his heart which commands him to march/go forth, in a kind of procession, if he feels free from condemnation when his heart is sentenced to continue/proceed; joyful, when feeling part of an entourage in which other creatures, both human and those of other realms, are included. In perfect serenity when he feels himself move in tune (al par con) with the stars and even with the firmament itself, as well as with the silent turning of the earth.

(Pues que) Since the inalienable, proper sound of which man is the bearer is his originating (initial) rhythm, the cadence when time is not traversed in a vacuum or monotonously. But time alone populates/inhabits time in its extension and internalizes it, and so revitalize it. And without pause the heart marks, without the necessity of either perception or the counterproductive will, the pause in which the situation/moment is extinguished, the gift (don) of the necessary emptiness/vacuum for the emergence (para que surja) what is there waiting to master the face (faz) of the present. And this imperceptible pause is a breath for man, who would need the gift of more space (que se le dieran mas anchamente estos respiros) between one situation and another however slight their differences, who always waits to live again anew simply as he breathes (?); to breathe free of all interference (acecho),

from the weight of the past, without knowing or feeling the present that is installed (que llega a instalarse), however pure it, the present, be, however unconnected (desligado) it seems/appears. (Pues que) Since it awaits the pure gift (don) of being without (any) determination/effort. The gift of being enbibed/absorbed by/into the gift of life, being and life without split/scission/division or difference at all, since all affliction (cuitar) comes from that being and life are given to man separately more than with any other living being that inhabit his planet. Only the far-off stars, pure whilst still inaccessible to colonization, furnish him with the real image of a being identical with life; innocent³, as if only created without having/needing to be born.

III

The heart is a prophet, as with that which being central is to be found on the boundary, on the border of going (even) further beyond where it has already gone (before). It is on the point of breaking out into speech, that its reiterated sound is articulated in those instants/moments in which it almost comes to a halt/stop to catch (its) breath. The new which man inhabits, the word, but not those we say, or at least as we say them, but rather a word that would be new by only sprouting, because it would surprise us like the daybreak of the word. Since man suffers for not being/bearing witness to his own creation. And to the creation of all the known and unknown universe. His yearning (ansia) to know seems to have no other source than that/the anxiety (ansia) of not having witnessed/been present the whole creation (of all) from the first light, from before: from the (unbroken) darkness. The theology of the great testimonial religions, as with the most circumspect philosophy (tambien lo da) speak of (?) the inescapability/inevitability of this revelation.

And this great resentment, this 'fundamental' resentment which the human being carries (within) in his heart, as the root (cause) of all the resentments that inhabit him at not having witnessed, and as the sole witness moreover, the act of creation does not seem to have been sufficiently taken into account. If we bear in mind/abide by the sacred story of Genesis, he succumbed to the seductive future promise: 'You will be as Gods' (? Check), not because of his hunger for happiness but rather by leaving the happiness that flooded him in search of a creation of his own, something he had done (que el hiciera), and not have to contemplate what he was offered/given, so as to flee the pure presence of those beings whose name he knew, but not their secret. But the word that fails to leave the heart is not lost, that new word in which the newness of the word would shine with inextinguishable clarity (light). The diaphanous, virginal word without the sin of intellect, will nor memory. And its brightness/clarity would possess what no word gives us the certainty of attaining: to be/being inextinguishable. It is not lost, it unties itself in voice, a voice that alone sighs and like the sigh ascends crossing/making its way through anguish and patience/respice/waiting; transcending.

And it is the voice that infiltrates certain words of everyday use/common usage and mostly even the (most) simplest ones, (those) that give/suggest certainty. And if they do not thus become inextinguishable, they possess a kind of strength and even a sacred formula (?).

And it is the inner voice that identifies with some voices, some words that are heard it is not known whether within or without, since they are heard from inside/within. And it also comes out/leaves to

³ In the typescript the text says: 'a being identical to its innocent life; as if it had only been created...'

listen to them, out of itself. And between inside and outside spirit in its entirety is suspended as it is with all identification from something in the heart that beats and something that objectively exists. It is the supreme terror that assails on hearing/listening to something which/what one fears but which is true (?). And the total forgetting of oneself on hearing what one didn't even know one was awaiting. And in this lucky/joyful case the perfect music is given; song.

IV

On occasion, circumstantially, the heart remains deaf and dumb. It withdraws enclosing itself in impenetrable silence or goes far away (*se va lejos*). It therefore/thus makes room for the operations of the mind that, abandoned to themselves, (can thus) move without any assistance. And at least amongst us Westerners, so resistant to silence, our perceptions quickly become (the) judgement of an imperative attitude; that attitude that precedes the content of the judgement, the 'judged'. And not always is the judged done so when the heart is light (*estuviese ligero*) or when it simply continues (along) its rhythmic way, the judged appearing then in another way, without throwing (*arrojar*) its cargo of weight/regret (*carga de peso*), without occasioning grief/remorse (*pesar*). Since it is the weight (*pesar*) of certain contents presented to consciousness that on occasion determine, and on others re-enforce, the judgement that fall back (*recae*) on them.

And so the weight of condemnation/sentence that befalls certain facts or beings might be established due to the weight they arouse in the consciousness that, without listening to the heart, judges them.

There is an imperceptible line, a level at which the heart begins to feel submerged/sunk. It finds not resistance in its surroundings for lack of a response to its incessant call – since its very beating is at/in its/the same/own time a call. And there is the silent, unsayable invocation that departs/leaves in an undefined direction, not because it is such, but because it is beyond all known direction. Since it is the habituated mind that establishes/maps out all known directions, which establishes the cardinal points leaving/making them meaningless. The discursive mind, the/that great co-ordinator which/that covers all.

And no direction offered to it by this mind (*al uso*) can open up a path for this unsayable call of the sunken heart.

And if the call is unsayable it is because no word that has been said/uttered works for/is useful to it. Which does not mean that there may not be some, one, from amongst those words it knows, that unsayably seeks. It searches for an ear; to hear and to be heard without realizing it, without distinction. So that its call is lost in the immensity of the only answer.

V

Not every centre is that of a sun; there may be various suns; and man can feel them without their battling each other. And it can happen that in moments of darkness the feeling/sensing and seeing/vision that corresponds to only one, of one only, disappear.

These suns appear as more or less shining centres of light in feeling and in all acts of knowledge which on feeling they follow and obey, and its irradiation is connected with the function/working of the heart, with its life-giving power.

Every vital centre gives life. And this is why the heart already as *physis* is the centre of all. Internal space, the soul, consciousness, the immediate field of our life, is not in truth made in the image of inert space, in which the so-called facts of consciousness are inscribed and associated as if coming from outside. On the contrary, when this space is called/referred to as a soul or heart that is deep, large/great, wide, immense, dark or luminous, it has been done so metaphorically (?).

And it is the heart's condition as a centre, *qua* centre, that determines and makes emerge those centres which shine, illuminating, and that indeed do refer to so-called external reality or the world, and that are reflected in internal centres (whilst) holding themselves above/over them. Nothing from outside, nothing from another world or beyond whatever world, stops being sustained by the human heart, the point at which multiple reality arrives to be measured and weighed in unthinkable calculus, in the image of the calculus of the creator of the universe. Leibniz tells us that God's calculus made the world. If the universe is of divine making, it is man's role to sustain/hold it. Thus, his heart must be an immense vase as well as the invulnerable point of the balance.

In this way, multiplicity, before establishing itself as such, is unified and balanced, without any of the realities that make it up are erased or submerged/buried. Since nothing that as real arrives at the human heart should be annulled nor turned away or left at the door; nothing real should be humiliated, not even those semi-realities that flutter around the living space of the heart, because they might end up becoming the reality they desire within it, or reveal their hidden reality, like the beggar to the alms giver who (thus) fulfills the hope of the splendid gift of poverty. And the heart itself, at times, turns out to be poorer than everyone else and, more than everyone else, if welcomed/taken in, a giver.

VI

Carried by its own weight, that weight which takes over when it can no longer carry/sustain itself, the heart cannot continue to descend without losing itself.

The heart is lost and becomes uncontrollable, especially if looked for. It reappears bringing something which it offers in a kind of annunciation. Because, at the same time that it announces its presence again, it announces something. And a renovation is then produced, a recommencement even if of the same, as from the beginning. Even more so if the heart is lost and delayed, until leaving the vacuum of its absence, it returns tired, unaccustomed, become a thing, a fact. The fact of a continuing tiredness/ that persists. And then what it announces is already a loss.

And there is the loss that is an abyss (*abismarse*), a unique abyss in which is fused – the heart always unifies – the abyss which inside it, within the seat that it is, opens, and the abyss in which it opens as in the centre of the universe where it is overwhelmed (*se anonada*). And then it is suddenly alone (??) or, in the depths of this nothingness, at least feeling alone. And thus nothingness is not merely nothing, but a plunging in it, an overwhelming. Similarly, the heart has not lost its centredness/condition as centre, it continues to feel itself as the breath of life, a breathing under the waters of post-creation. And it feels the nothingness in which all creation was to fall: like water because of its inconsistency, because ungraspable, for being the place of dissolution in which all is drowned; a place that denies movement and repose; and thus of simple being and discernment. And this heart will not ascend to the surface of

these waters which seem not to hold it, if a unique spark is not lit in it, by it, inside and outside it at the same time, which, made in the darkness, lights up the indivisible light, making of this heart something like its lamp.

The light descends, piercing the darkness and denseness because, in this universe that presents itself as our home (habitacion), curves/bends like a servant. And like a servant it flows like water, a water that infiltrates the solidity of the darkness that has become foundation walls. But on arriving here it/the light comes to a halt and abandons the heart that lowering descends into the darkness in which, because there is no longer a drop/note⁴ of light, all reference is lost. Discernment is not possible where view/sight comes to a halt. This heart would make a dangerous mistake if it believed, as in a dream, it could overpower/dominate/overcome the darkness; if it prepared itself to confront nothingness by just returning upstream; if it attempted to become will. The will can only (act), when it can, in the light of the understanding that discerns things and not just beings, even though the masks of a monster that under and through them gives and hides its face; gives its face hiding it behind/under things and events. No thing or event subsists in the nothingness, and the will, if it emerges, would be a knot, the mere potentiality of impossible unfolding.

VII

And the reiteration of the work of the heart is at last revealed as its beating, the pulsation of a centre, the seat/centre that perhaps only rarely, but unforgettably, reveals/manifests its presence (in feeling). Having perceived the reiterated beat of the heart as a pulsation from the centre of life remains/is left as unforgettable news that remains to be revealed; going to be (irlo siendo - ?). And what is undertaken (acomete) in the first beat of this pulsation is its strange vulnerability, sprouting as if in/on a strange border/confines of nothingness or of emptiness; with non-being or with death. If it is not faithful to this primary feeling, it is nothing but (todo ello resulta ser) names, not proper names, but (merely?) terms of speech. And if it forgets them, then, the mind has no other name when it should have been a proper name, and not the transcription of concept forged for general use. Every concept generates (an) extension, however unknown or unlimited/without limit. Whilst the unique, inalienable proper name is what confers presence only on being uttered, what undoes supplication or invocation, or which bursts forth without letting itself be known in the cry/howl/wail, which is scattered in the cry.

And so, if one is loyal to that feeling that founds the simple perception of the heart's pulsation/beat as the centre of our lives, there remains their reiteration/repetition as the victory that rises, the victory of our life, or that of another enclosed in it. A centre of life, wordless (but) with its own unique dominion. Against it all reason is reasonless, whilst the truth approaches it as promised (agreed/betrothed). (But) Only as promised/betrothed, (and) in no hurry to be wed (??? SO?), that still awaits. And as such defends that centre/seat that beats on the confines themselves, being as still felt, enclosed/imprisoned. But no longer feeling lost in foreign lands, on undefined earth, on the border. The hardly perceptible white presence of the promised truth, (still) awaits (it).

VIII

⁴ In the typescript the word gota (drop) is found here instead of 'nota' (note).

As life's home, as well as its course, it is difficult for the heart to encounter its own reality; that it touch itself purely, as a unity. Which means: without reflecting or looking at itself, outside of itself, seeing itself in a mirror that would reflect back its image, and without the anguish of being looked at by someone that might be its equal that would return an image to annex. Seeking neither complement nor supplement, alone.

There is a kind of solitude that begins not in isolation but in a dispossessing oneself of all property. A being alone, not because of lack of company, but for having extinguished that sense of the proper, for having abolished one's law of appropriation. And with this the colonization that continually obliges one to take leave of oneself, of taking care of an other knowing it to be 'other', or within another, such that it belongs to one.

In this state the heart is inside/within itself without feeling at all sustained, as if in no need of it, nor either of sustaining anything at all; it does not work, nor does it/or toil. It is gathered, almost transparent, into a kind of revelation of its interiority. And the usual question, the one that emerges endlessly with the supposition that all knowledge begins with a question, is formulated (and posed): 'what is (the nature/character) your being?' For this, the being of an interiority, the only that can still be said to us/told of us that it is the being which from the inside, from itself, is given to feel to man/to feel, in (its) purity and unity. Because thought is also gathered/gathers. But when it is/does and ceases to travel (?recorrer) its endless discourse, it identifies/is/becomes identified with the heart. Together, intelligence and the heart form that being that, able to reveal/manifest/show its being without any reflection at all, beats and encourages. Without seeing itself reflected in anything and without because of this to feel nothingness either within or hunting/watching it (al acecho). A unity that present itself as ephemeral since it loses itself due to the care the human condition demands and which increasingly threatens to devour it. But, the unifying gathering of the mind with being saves, even when giving itself discontinuously, testifying of a being that is life, and vivifying life.

Silence reveals the heart in its being. A being that offers itself without any qualification, and even without reference to a determined situation which, if existing, would qualify it. It is not quantity nor quality and is neither above nor fallen, and, what would seem most appropriate to its being, nor does it embrace anything. It is not in truth/In truth it is not. And what is closest to this its being (it may be said) is that it keeps a secret without concealing it, and that it keeps being where it dwells.

And the silence extends like a means/medium/environment that does not let its weight nor limits be felt; in this pure silence no privation is noticed/there is no warning of privation at all.

The major proof of the quality of this revelatory silence is the way in which time passes without being felt/noticed, without making itself felt as successive time or as an imprisoning a-temporality, but rather as a time that is consumed without leaving a residue, without producing a past; as if flapping (its wings) without escaping itself, without menace/threat, without even signaling the arrival of the present, let alone steer towards a future. A time without transit.

And the word is neither possible nor necessary, since the word itself is transitory, it given in a time it transits and with it accelerates or detains, without violence. Which is (what is) proper to that which (is?) creates its own place and reposes in it without coming to a halt/stopping to move. It is very true that little has been ascertained/proved about being's own movements, or of something that is. More is known – or was known – about the movement they cause of rather originate: to attract, to move away,

to detain/stop, to create insuperable distances with then in an instant are annulled in unsayable/unutterable intimacy or trust. In the movements proper to being all is quality. A quality that rules over quantity and that doubtlessly comes from the trace of the absolute that is produced within this our human experience, that something that is felt as irreducible. It must be accepted as it is, as it manifests itself. These are movements attributed to the divine and which appear in her as the mirror of perfection, whilst in the human being they appear as arrogance, or waning, a letting be. And as decadence too, of a way of being or acting that once upon a time took place and was lost, a lost secret or simply a transgression.

Because in the human no movement, even those of the heart, appears free of intention, except in exceptional/privileged moments. And in intention there is something like a self-proposition (of itself), a proposal to be something or someone. It is here, in this lack of innocence, that it is mostly felt, in these movements of being, anterior to all moral(ity).

And so, reposing/cradled in itself, the heart cannot, except in rare moments of luck, breathe within/in the silence of its being. But/Indeed, does it in fact have enough being to do so? Only whilst it is (silently) (with)in itself in silence, without pretention, without intention. Without proposing that anything reach it there where it thus reposes. And its place is such a hollow in which it does not float in a vacuum, nor become attached as if in a dark place; where, in this transitory state that reveals its being, it is innocent. It is a presence, and no more. A presence which, on ceasing being so, will gather everything that presents itself before a human being, to every presence and, naturally, to the absence of something and even to the absence of everything. And the measure of the innocence of the heart, of each heart, would give, if its measure could be given, the diversity of presences which the wealth of the world, and even the splendor of what we have named the universe, presents to/before that heart.

Because there is an intimate, indissoluble correlation between innocence and universality. Only man, endowed with an innocent heart, can/might inhabit the universe.

IX

The heart is the cup of pain, which it can keep for a time, but which inexorably it then, in an instant, gives. And then it is a chalice which the whole of a person's being must swallow (up). And if it does so slowly with the necessary courage, on being diffused/spread through the diverse/varied/various zones of being reason too begins to circulate with pain, mixed with it, in it.

The risk, so often fulfilled/achieved/accomplished, of 'impassivity' which, from so far or so high, is established/believed to be indispensable to rational thought/knowledge, is that of impeding reason being noticed, first of all in pain, united to it and as if engendered or at least revealed by it. That pain were an almost accidental fact. That pain had no essence, that it were an unavoidable state, but that it have no essence nor substance, no reason at all. That it could do no more than be there without circulating. And on not circulating, not, in truth, truthfully, be assimilated.

In this offering of the heart, cup, chalice (full) of pain, the suffering that is ongoing, and which crawls for times immemorial without unity, like a liana that entangles reason so that it is not free, is actualized and becomes an act (??): Reason in action frees itself from this serpentine passivity, from this moan/groan,

and the will finally accomplishes the deafening of the heart itself, the centre/headquarters of hearing (centro del oír) to an eminent degree (?). That deafness of the heart that in protecting it, betrays it.

The heart: cup and seat/centre, both/together.

(A) Centre that in suffering moves and which receptive/as it receives gives/endows continuity, and which hidden cannot but give itself. And being the seat/centre of continuity, is an active centre. The river of life which submits to number and rhythm passes through it. Active passivity. Mediator without pause. Slave that governs. Subdued by time, it conducts it, notifying (avisando) both its passing and its end, allowing for a sense of a beyond of the reigning temporality we know, or rather presume. The heart thus seems like a son of the young Chronos in Hesiod's *Theogony*, one of those sons he devoured to keep them hidden in his entrails; the son that, in a certain way, justifies this strange form of paternity. Since being a son of time prophesizes a kingdom that surpasses him and in a certain way reveals in these moments/instants in which the heart is suspended and suspends the being that lives on (sobre el) time; in the/those privileged instants/moments, (in which) ecstasy (is) given to all mortals, in limitless pain, and in the plenitude of life in which the contraries – or at least divergent – love and freedom, reason and passion, are unified.

Everything/All passes through the heart which makes all pass. But something also passes/must pass in it that does not leave with the river of life and time we know.

Something must leave making itself hidden in that, its, darkness, which following the paradox of the law that rules it, would be something invulnerable and shining.

And so, when in an instant it remains wholly still it will open ajar, giving all of itself. This is its dream. Like everything enclosed, the heart dreams of escaping, like the chained, to become detached, even at the cost of tearing (itself). Like everything that contains something precious, with spreading it about in one go. Whilst it so dreams of itself the heart reiterates itself and violence is then its chain, which it drags more passive than ever. It makes its way blind, it alone can take the light down, to the hells (?ínteros) of being. It cannot/will not be free without knowing itself. Paradoxically, the mediating heart, which provides light and vision, must know itself. Will this be the true reflection, the silent dialogue of the light with whomsoever welcomes and undergoes/bears it, carries it beyond the longing and fear that engender the dreams and fantasies of being, of the human being submitted to the time it wants to cross/exceed? And the silent dialogue of the light with the dark in which it fancies to germinate. The heart as/becomes bark when it knows, contains and protects the embryo of light. And then, now free of fear, it desires/wishes to unravel, to unravel itself, lose itself, becoming lost until identified with the endless/infinite centre.⁵

⁵ In the typescript the text continues as follows: 'lose itself, becoming lost until identified with the endless/infinite centre. Losing itself, burning itself'.